

Mark 7:31-37

³¹Jesus left the region of Tyre again and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of the Decapolis.

³²They brought a man to him who was deaf and had a speech impediment. They pleaded with Jesus to place his hand on him. ³³Jesus took him aside in private, away from the crowd. He put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴After he looked up to heaven, he sighed and said, "*Ephphatha!*" (which means "Be opened!") ³⁵Immediately the man's ears were opened, his tongue was set free, and he began to speak plainly. ³⁶Jesus gave the people strict orders to tell no one, but the more he did so, the more they kept proclaiming it. ³⁷They were amazed beyond measure and said, "He has done everything well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak!"

Evaluate

I.

How much do you rely on evaluations? Brick and mortar stores would like you to give them a positive evaluation just as much as online retailers. Shop online and you will often be asked to evaluate a specific product you have purchased. Did it meet your expectations? Is the quality up to standards? How did the item perform over time? Did you still like it months after your initial impression?

Restaurants, of course, are a natural for asking for reviews. The ambiance of the restaurant is often taken into consideration. Of course, topping the list of importance is the quality and taste of the food, but if the service is bad, or exceptionally slow, it destroys an otherwise positive experience; and your evaluation will probably reflect that.

Reviews are great, aren't they? Based on the evaluations of others you might pick which particular restaurant to eat in for a particular special dinner. They might help you decide which business to patronize. Perhaps you will use the evaluations of other customers to help you decide which handyman to hire, or which pest-control or lawn service to employ.

Reviews can be misleading sometimes, can't they? It might not really be a reflection on the business at all; the customer writing the review might have received a report they didn't really want to hear. Repairs for the car are going to be much more expensive than originally expected. The procedure you need isn't going to be covered by insurance, or will be subject to some high co-pay or deductible.

II.

A business or an individual *always* wants a good review.

At the end of today's Gospel the people say of Jesus: "He has done everything well" (Mark 7:37, EHV). It's great to hear, isn't it? Jesus got 5-stars from all the people who were there. Others would be able to read this review or hear about this review and be directed to goods and services they could expect to receive if they patronized the "Jesus" business.

Jesus, however, didn't *want* their 5-star review. It seems rather strange, actually. After performing this miracle of giving a deaf man the ability to hear and speak: "Jesus gave the people strict orders to tell no one" (Mark 7:36, EHV). Why?

You might think that Jesus was using reverse psychology; tell the crowd *not* to give their review knowing that they will be even more inclined to spread the news about what they have seen and heard. I doubt it.

Jesus is far more important than a magic side-show at the carnival. That's why he didn't want the 5-star reviews the crowds were so willing to give. They didn't even understand the service they were reviewing. He didn't come to be a hospital to cure sick patients. He didn't come to put food in their stomachs, as he was about to do at the Feeding of the 4,000 right after our text. The people wanted someone to take care of their every earthly need—and their desires, as well.

None of those things were the reasons Jesus came. He *did* miracles, to be sure. He healed the sick and fed the hungry from time to time; but that isn't what he came for. Widespread news of the 5-star reviews given for his miracles of healing would send even more people flocking to Jesus for the wrong reasons.

III.

You could say that *Jesus* gave a review of his own in this account. “They brought a man to him who was deaf and had a speech impediment. They pleaded with Jesus to place his hand on him” (Mark 7:32, EHV). This man probably didn't know much about Jesus. Most people couldn't read in those days, so it was even less likely that anyone was going to try and teach a deaf man to read. They couldn't write some information down for him to understand who Jesus was. They couldn't tell him, since he couldn't understand the words coming out of their mouths. Any sign language they could use with him was rudimentary, at best. The man just didn't know anything about Jesus.

What was the evaluation? “Jesus took him aside in private, away from the crowd. He put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴After he looked up to heaven, he sighed and said, ‘Ephphatha!’ (which means ‘Be opened!’) ³⁵Immediately the man's ears were opened, his tongue was set free, and he began to speak plainly” (Mark 7:33-35, EHV).

Have you ever noticed that Jesus often left the crowds behind? Rather than thriving on the noise and mayhem of the cities and their social scenes, we often hear that Jesus took his disciples off to some quiet place to be alone with them and to talk with them; also he wanted some time alone to spend in prayer with his Heavenly Father.

In this particular instance, it wasn't the *crowd* that was important, but the one man. Jesus is always concerned for the one hurting and needy person. So the first thing Jesus did was to take him aside, away from the crowd. Jesus could have healed this man by just speaking to him, or looking at him, or waving vaguely in his direction. Instead, he used some sign language to personalize his message for this one man. He put his fingers in the man's ears—a clue to what was about to happen. He spit and touched the man's tongue—another clue. *Then* he spoke the word.

Jesus evaluated the crowd's request and found that one man's need was very important. That man needed to hear and to know about Jesus.

IV.

“They were amazed beyond measure and said, ‘He has done everything well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak!’” (Mark 7:37, EHV). The crowd was short-sighted and didn't really understand what they were reviewing. None-the-less, they were right: “He has done everything well.”

He always does everything well. In this case, he directed all his attention to one individual and took care of him. He always shows mercy to the least and the lowest. As a teacher, he teaches his hearers what is true—and what is truly important. He always

submitted to his Father's will. As Savior, Jesus came to rescue the lost and forgotten. He has done everything well.

How do *you* evaluate Jesus? How has he done in his ministry to you? Do you take off a star or two when your medical diagnosis is not what you wanted to hear? Perhaps the tone of the words of your evaluation becomes a bit harsh because of the difficulties you have faced; you prayed about things, but Jesus didn't take your problems away. Modern church culture has adopted postmodernism's attitude—there is no absolute truth. Do you start to remove stars when you hear that *your* lifestyle choices are not God-pleasing?

Jesus has done all things well. But sometimes God doesn't give us the things we want. Sometimes people give Jesus a 1-star review and leave him. They don't understand, and they don't want to listen to what he really has to say.

V.

“Jesus gave the people strict orders to tell no one, but the more he did so, the more they kept proclaiming it” (Mark 7:36, EHV).

Jesus didn't want the reviews of the crowd because he knew they didn't understand what they were reviewing. He came to save all people in the world from their sins. His task was so much larger than what they were reviewing.

He did all things well. Right up to the very end he did all things well. From the cross he cried out “It is finished!” when he had completed the task he came to do.

The strict orders to keep silent are no longer in place. Why? Because you know that Jesus really *has* done all things well. You *do* know what Jesus came to do, unlike the crowds. You *do* understand. You are not plagued—I hope—with postmodernism's idea that there is no absolute truth and there are no absolute standards. You know that God's Word *is* truth. Everything needed for salvation is in there. Nothing is missing that anyone needs to know about what God's plan for mankind is and how Jesus did everything well to carry out that plan.

You know that what God wants for people—for each individual soul—is for the deafness of their unbelief to be opened to the truth of what Jesus did. You know that God wants their tongues to be set free to speak that message of salvation to others—just as you know God wants *you* to do.

So evaluate. Give your 5-star review: Jesus has done all things well. Thank God every day that he has touched your ears with the gospel and has set free your tongue. Jesus has won your salvation and the salvation of all. Amen.